COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

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COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS is intended to provide quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). It is produced regularly throughout the academic year. This issue covers the months of January and February 2006.

Eight new Ontario Research Chairs awarded to six Ontario universities

On February 15, 2006, the six Ontario universities that had been awarded endowments for eight government-sponsored chairs in public policy were announced:

- McMaster University, Educational Policy and At-Risk Students;
- Queen's University, Bioethics;
- University of Toronto (awarded three chairs), Biomarkers in Disease Management, Health Policy and System Design, and Postsecondary Education Policy and Measurement;
- University of Waterloo, Environmental Policy and Renewable Energy;
- University of Windsor, Cross-Border Transportation Policy, and
- York University, Economics and Cross-Cultural Studies.

The winning universities, which were selected by an arm's-length Selection Panel, have already begun their searches for distinguished candidates for the new chairs, and it is expected that the merits of the government's investment will be visible within the next two years. All six institutions plan to supplement the endowment with their own resources, which means that appointments of the highest calibre can be expected.

"Our universities play a vital role in helping unlock Ontario's creative potential," said Premier and Research and Innovation Minister Dalton McGuinty. "Creating Ontario Research Chairs demonstrates our government's commitment to helping make our province a leading innovation-based economy."

David Strangway, Chair of the Ontario Research Chairs Selection Panel, noted that Ontario universities responded brilliantly to the request for proposals: "Only eight chairs could be funded; the choices were very hard. The panel concluded that no fewer than 19 proposals were so meritorious that they would unreservedly qualify for funding."

In the 2005 Budget, the Ontario government committed $25 million to fund eight new chairs in public policy. For more information on the chairs program and program capsules, visit the web site at *http://orc.cou.on.ca*.

COU submits case for renewal of campus facilities to Standing Committee

On February 1, 2006, COU submitted its brief to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs outlining the university sector's need for renewal of campus facilities, made that much more urgent by the unabated growth in the demand for university education. It is estimated that 435,000 undergraduate students will be enrolled at Ontario universities by 2011 – an increase of well over 50% over the decade.

While the *Reaching Higher* initiatives announced in the 2005 Budget have put Ontario universities in a much stronger position to serve the growing numbers of students, the renewal of university facilities and infrastructure is not keeping pace and is, in fact, lagging dangerously behind. In Ontario today, there are some 1,000 university buildings totalling approximately 5.5 million square metres of academic and administrative facilities across 23 campuses. Their average age is over 30 years old – the age that usually calls for major renewal investments. Of the buildings audited in the 2005 audit of the physical condition of university facilities, about half of these buildings are considered to be in poor condition.

In 2005 the Ontario government provided an additional $133.3 million in funding to its ongoing facilities renewal program, and Ontario universities welcomed the one-time infusion. However, the $26.7 annual funding for facilities renewal falls far short of the estimated $260 million needed to minimally maintain and upgrade university buildings. And these are not the only pressures. There are facility and infrastructure pressures related to research funding, including funding for the indirect costs of research and ever-increasing utility budgets.

As the brief notes, Ontario universities are facing $1.77 billion in deferred maintenance and adaptation renovations to academic and administrative facilities. If one adds the cost of repairing or replacing infrastructure (steam, power and water distribution systems) – another 15% – the total figure moves closer to $2 billion. The longer this deferred maintenance problem is left unchecked, the more expensive it will become to correct and the more difficult it will become for Ontario universities to provide a quality education for students.

For a copy of COU's *Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs*, visit the COU web site (www.cou.on.ca).

Quality and Productivity Task Force reports on university initiatives

COU established the Quality and Productivity Task Force to examine initiatives to improve the quality and productivity of university education in Ontario, taking account of improvement initiatives in other jurisdictions and the Ontario public service. The impetus for the creation of the Task Force sprang from the provincial government's 2005 Budget. Under its *Reaching Higher* plan, the Ontario government announced significant investment in postsecondary education, placing heavy emphasis on ensuring deliverable results from this investment.

Vivek Goel, Vice-President, Academic and Provost, University of Toronto, was selected to chair the Task Force, which is made up of senior representatives representing a broad spectrum of areas across Ontario's 18 member institutions and the Ontario College of Art & Design. Over the last several months, the Task Force has been outlining the specific quality and productivity initiatives that universities have implemented, summarizing major findings on the improvements that flow from the additional investment and identifying key principles that support such improvements. The end goal is to provide a set of key recommendations for the university community that will be summarized in a report due out in early spring.

To complement the report, COU has also begun production on a DVD and web component that will present a cross-section of initiatives under five themes – student learning, teaching, access, research and campus environment – searchable by topic and institution. The DVD, which will be produced in limited quantities, and the searchable web database, which will appear on COU's web site (www.cou.on.ca), will be launched in April.

OUAC January statistics in: secondary school applications on the rise

Ontario secondary school students applied to Ontario universities in greater numbers this year, according to the preliminary report released by the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). As of the January 11 deadline, 75,660 secondary school applicants – an increase of 3.7% over 2005 – had made 331,061 application choices for full-time admission for fall 2006. The average number of choices per applicant (4.4) remained the same as last year.

From January 9 to 11, OUAC's computer systems handled 16,700 applications, and on January 10, OUAC experienced the heaviest volume of applications in the Centre's history, with 8,636 applications processed in one day. Staff from the Centre's help desk also worked additional days and evenings during December and January to help applicants who were experiencing difficulties in applying online.

OUAC continues to receive and process applications for students applying to Ontario universities for fall admission, and regular statistical updates will be posted on OUAC's web site (www.ouac.on.ca/news/uapp/underappstats.html) in the coming months.

Minister Bentley attends meeting of CCOU and Executive Heads

On February 16, 2006, Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, participated in the luncheon meeting of the Council of Chairs of Ontario Universities (CCOU) and Executive Heads. The meeting was held at the Bank of Montreal corporate offices of Rose Patten, Senior Executive Vice-President, Human Resources, who is Chair of the University of Toronto Governing Council. Ms. Patten, CCOU Chair Reid Morden, who chairs Trent University's Board of Governors, and York University President Lorna Marsden, acting on behalf of COU Chair Ross Paul, made brief remarks. A discussion on a range of issues affecting the university sector followed.

COU releases report on inventory of university physical facilities

COU recently published the triennial report, *Inventory of Physical Facilities of Ontario Universities 2004-05*. The report provides actual and generated space (based on COU space standards) on 20 categories of space by institution as of November 1, 2004. In the three years between the 2001-02 and 2004-05 inventory reports, Ontario universities have seen a 26% increase in FTE (full-time equivalent) enrolment due to the double cohort and rising participation rates, an 18.7% increase in FTE faculty and an 11.6% increase in inventory due to a significant investment in capital projects through the Ontario government's SuperBuild initiative.

The ratio of actual inventory to the recommended space requirement is 73% (in 2001-02, the ratio was 78.2%). Ratios of less than 100% mean that the actual inventory is less than the recommended (or generated) inventory according to COU standards. The ratio of actual space per FTE student is 8.6 NASM (net assignable square meters), the lowest rate since COU has been producing this report.

For a copy of the report, visit COU's web site (www.cou.on.ca).

Ontario universities to attend national summit on postsecondary education

On February 23 to 24, 2006, the Council of the Federation – which is made up of all 13 provincial and territorial premiers – will hold a summit in Ottawa on five key priority areas, including postsecondary education and skills training. The summit will be co-chaired by Premiers Dalton McGuinty and Jean Charest, both of whom also co-chaired a special meeting of provincial and territorial ministers responsible for postsecondary education, skills training and finance in October 2005.

The Council has invited over 300 stakeholders representing students, colleges, universities, business, labour, and provinces and territories to participate in discussions that will explore key issues and challenges in postsecondary education and skills training. Many Ontario universities will be represented. The provinces hope to use outcomes from the summit to call on the new federal government to adhere to election promises to address fiscal imbalances and to plot the course for education and skills training systems into the future.

New editor of *Maclean's* university rankings attends OUPAC meeting

On February 3, 2006, the Ontario Universities' Public Affairs Council (OUPAC), in one of its three meetings scheduled during the academic year, met with the new editor who will oversee *Maclean's* annual university rankings and its university guidebook, Tony Keller. Barely a week into his new position, Mr. Keller, who was accompanied by senior editor Mary Dwyer, touched on how he has been charged with not only overseeing these two publications but also expanding the magazine's university franchise. Beginning this spring, *Maclean's* will publish a stand-alone issue based on its University Graduate Survey, which was published in the university rankings issue in 2004. Mr. Keller welcomed comments and encouraged future dialogue among universities.

In Production...

In December 2005, Bob Rae was honoured with the David C. Smith Award for Significant Contribution to Scholarship and Policy on Higher Education in Canada and, in keeping with the tradition of the award, he delivered a lecture on higher education and public policy issues. Both a video recording and an edited transcript of Mr. Rae's unscripted remarks are now posted on COU's web site (www.cou.on.ca). A DVD is also in production, to be reproduced in limited quantities, that features Mr. Rae's remarks (in both video and hard copy formats), biographies of the late Dr. Smith and all recipients of the award to date, and transcripts of lectures.

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